So that is a genuine challenge for us, but one that I have so far had only the highest compliments for the Congress and the Members of both parties about how they're meeting it, because everybody knows it's a big issue.

Mr. Brokaw. It would be a huge item on the agenda, I would think, in 2000; don't you think?

The President. It depends on—well, it will be unless we are able to——

Mr. Brokaw. Head it off first——

The President. ——yes, adequately address it now. But there has really been no partisan difference here. I mean, I proposed the first substantial increase in defense spending since, oh, the middle of President Reagan's second term, this year, largely to address not only some of our equipment needs but mostly the people needs. And you know, you get the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years, and you get incomes rising at the highest rate in 25 years, it's hard to keep folks, and you have more competition for people coming right out of school. So we're just going to have to work at it.

NOTE: The interview began at 2:50 p.m. at Spangdahlem Air Base. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. Wesley K. Clark, USA Supreme Allied Commander Europe; Gen. Klaus Naumann, chairman, North Atlantic Treaty Organization Military Committee; Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene of Belgium; Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany; President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); Ibrahim Rugova, leader, Democratic League of Kosovo; and Brig. Gen. Scott Van Cleef, USAF, Commander, 52d Air Expeditionary Wing. This interview was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 6. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With European Journalists at Rhein Main Air Base, Germany

May 6, 1999

Objectives in Kosovo

Q. Thank you for coming. It's great to have you here. We understand you do have a very tight schedule. For NATO it is a difficult and challenging time, so we do very much appreciate that you join us and discuss these matters and questions with us, and we share your views on it.

Just last week you said, "We know what the final outcome in Kosovo will be. Serbian forces will leave, and an international security force will be deployed. Refugees will return with security and self-government." Why are you so optimistic? Have we actually come closer to that prospect?

The President. I believe we have. First of all, we still have an Alliance that, if anything, is more united than ever, after we met in Washington. I was yesterday in Brussels to get a report from General Naumann and General Clark on the progress of the campaign. I'm convinced that we are making good progress, that we are coming closer to our objectives. I think that Mr. Milosevic's military and economic apparatus of control in Yugoslavia has been weakened.

I believe we're coming closer on the diplomatic front. I met for a long time with Mr. Chernomyrdin, and he met with—several more hours with Vice President Gore in Washington this week. Russia had previously accepted political terms of the agreement in Rambouillet that there ought to be security and autonomy for the people of Kosovo.

So we're not there yet, but I think it's important, too, for the world community, and especially for the people of Europe, to have some perspective here. The campaign that Mr. Milosevic has carried out in Kosovo was meticulously planned many months in advance. It was almost implemented in October last year. He decided not to do it then in the face of the NATO threats, but he had 40,000 troops on the ground and almost 300 tanks. So he could have done what he did at any time.

What we have to do is to reverse the ethnic cleansing, and I believe it can be done. I am absolutely confident that as long as we all stay together, which we seem determined to do—I certainly am, and I feel very good about where the other European leaders are—this will prevail. It will happen. And it's just a question of our being patient and persistent and understanding what we're up against and what we have to do.

Responsibility for Ethnic Cleansing

Q. Mr. President, we're going to take it in turn, so it will swing back and forth. My question is about your attitude, your thoughts about President Milosevic in Belgrade, and it's in a couple of parts. My first simple question is, do you believe that Milosevic should be held personally, directly responsible for the ethnic cleansing that you've described many times and for the massacres that you've described many times?

The President. Well, of course, that ultimately is a decision to be made by the war crimes tribunal itself. It's a legal question——

Q. But morally, as well as legally.

The President. But I think, morally, there is no question that, not only here but earlier in Bosnia, what happened was the direct result of a carefully calculated campaign to, first of all, bring Mr. Milosevic to power and then to enhance his power based on an idea of Greater Serbia, which required the dehumanization, the delegitimization of the Muslim people, first of Bosnia and then of Kosovo, and that, following from that, there are lots of records that the International Red Cross and other humanitarian agencies have amassed, that the U.N. has amassed about the practices of Serbian troops, of the paramilitaries. Just in Kosovo, we have story after story of horrible stories of people being—men being tied up together and burned alive. And there has also been, beyond the murder and the rape and the dislocation, there's been a determined effort, first in Bosnia, now in Kosovo, to destroy the personal records of people's presence on their land, as well as the historical and cultural records and obviously the religious sites of a people. So I think we have a big record here.

Q. But Mr. President, if that is the record and ultimately it lies at the doorstep of Mr. Milosevic, how can there be even an imagined settlement in which Mr. Milosevic essentially climbs down, accepts the conditions that you've laid out and is still the President of Yugoslavia and, ultimately, still holds sovereignty over Kosovo and the people who will return to Kosovo? Because you say you want them to live with security and dignity, but how is that conceivable?

The President. Well, if there is an international force that has NATO at its core, but also has other countries—I would welcome the Russians' participation there; I think it's important—so that there is genuine protection for the people of Kosovo, and they have the genuine autonomy that they enjoyed under the constitution that Mr. Tito put in and that was taken away by Mr. Milosevic 10 years ago, I think they can plainly do that.

Q. Even with Milosevic in power?

The President. Yes. Now, as long as he and Serbia pursue the course they have pursued and basically assert the right to destroy people's lives and heritage because of their religious and ethnic background, they will never be full partners in Europe. But we can protect the Kosovars, just as we have worked out a solution in Bosnia.

And I think the alternative to your suggestion, sir, would be something that no one has suggested, and that is that the international community, in effect, declare war on Yugoslavia and march on Belgrade. If that is not to happen, and our goals never entail that—our goals were bring the Kosovars home, let them live in security, let them live with the autonomy that, clearly, they deserve and have to have now to have any sense of a normal life—then those goals can be achieved with an enforceable agreement with Mr. Milosevic in Belgrade.

To what extent he bears personal responsibility as a matter of law, that has to be dealt with by the tribunal. But the main thing that I would like people to understand is that throughout history we have had examples, throughout all history, of ethnic cleansing. In my own country, we had horrible examples of Native American tribes being moved off their land and killed in large numbers, with people claiming a religious mandate, over a hundred years ago, and we're still paying for it. We're still trying to overcome it. We had the example of slavery that we're still trying to completely overcome.

But this is the end of the 20th century, a century in which, if we didn't learn anything, we learned that we cannot tolerate this kind of behavior. We all have to live together, to cherish each other's common humanity and celebrate our differences, not use them

to exterminate each other. No modern country can define its greatness by its ability to dehumanize a group of people. And I think we can achieve what we're trying to achieve here if these conditions can be met.

You know, people ask me all the time how this can be done, but we, eventually—it took too long, and it's one of my great regrets that it did take so long in Bosnia, but it was done there. And we're acting far more quickly in Kosovo, and I think as a consequence of that, even though, now, it seems agonizingly slow, I think when this is over and you look back at it, you'll say it happened more quickly, and therefore, a higher percentage of the people did go home and went home much more quickly than has been the case in Bosnia.

Serbian Release of Ibrahim Rugova

Q. Mr. President, I have a longer question than my colleague from the BBC. It's a four-part question. Obviously, the subject is Mr. Rugova. Mr. President, were you consulted by the Italian Government prior to this initiative? And how do you consider this Italian initiative, as a positive development? Are you interested in meeting Mr. Rugova, and is Mr. Rugova at this point the best political interlocutor for the Allies? And finally, do you see Rugova's departure from Pristina as a good will gesture by Milosevic that should be reciprocated by the Allies?

The President. Well, first, let me say Prime Minister D'Alema attempted to call me yesterday when I was making my rounds with the American troops, and I spoke with him early this morning. We had a very good talk, and I think he will have more to say later today.

I have also met with Mr. Rugova in the White House, and I have a very high opinion of him, so I was very pleased that he was released.

Q. What did you say to Mr. D'Alema, Prime Minister D'Alema?

The President. That I was very pleased that he was released; I felt good that he had come to Italy; that Prime Minister D'Alema has been a very strong partner in what we have tried to do together; that I think that this could turn out to be quite a positive development because, I believe, Mr. Rugova will again affirm his desire to see Kosovo be autonomous, be secure. I think he understands the need for an international security presence. So I see this as a positive development.

I think—now, you ask me what were the motives. One of your questions was why did Mr. Milosevic do this. I think for two reasons, probably: one is, he may be moving closer to accepting the basic conditions necessary to resolve this matter. And if so, he may want as many leaders as possible with whom to deal, and Mr. Rugova is known for his devotion to nonviolence, and therefore, he may see that as a positive event if he is going to make an agreement. Secondly, I feel the same way I did when the American soldiers were released. I think this should be evidence to all of you that the determination and unity of NATO to persist until this matter is resolved is having an impact in Belgrade.

Q. So should this good will gesture be reciprocated by the Allies?

The President. Well, I don't know that it's a good will gesture to release a nonviolent leader of a country who never did anything wrong in the first place and shouldn't have been, in effect, under house arrest. I think that Mr. Milosevic did this because he thought it was in his interest. And I'm glad Mr. Rugova is free, but I want over one million Kosovars to be able to go home.

And I think we should do what is necessary—the most important good will gesture NATO can make, and the European allies, the United States, and Canada can make, is to do whatever is necessary to resolve this as quickly as possible. That's the most humane thing we can do, and that's what I intend to do.

Q. And will you meet Rugova again?

The President. If he would like to, I would be happy to meet him. I like him very much. I appreciate what he's tried to do. He's been through a lot. I think that there are—you asked another question that I don't think is for the United States to answer, or even for NATO to answer, which is whether he or anyone else should be the designated spokesperson for the Kosovars. That is for the—we believe in democracy. We believe there has to be some way for the people themselves to decide who speaks for them.

And let me remind you, the thing that was important about the agreement that was reached in France is that all the elements of the Kosovars said, ''Okay, we'll lay down our arms. We'll stop the fighting. We will live in peace if we have the security of an international force to protect our autonomy and to protect our safety.'' If all elements do that—that is, if they also are still willing to meet our conditions, then the position of our country should be that we're trying to make self-government possible for these people, not to tell them who should govern. It's not the right thing to do.

Q. Mr. President, as you know, they are divided, the Kosovar Albanians are divided——

The President. Of course, they are.

Q. The KLA have already said that Mr. Rugova has no mandate to negotiate. So whom do you regard as an interlocutor and as a representative of the Kosovar Albanians——

The President. My position is that all the elements of leadership in Kosovo took a position at Rambouillet, and what we're trying to do is to fulfill the minimum conditions for that. After that, there is plenty of time after that for them to decide how to organize their internal political life, as long as all the parties remain committed to the principle that they will lay down their arms, and they will be nonviolent, if we have return of refugees, the security of an international force, and a withdrawal of the Serb forces. If those conditions are met—and then the other thing—I want to remind everyone of this—the other thing NATO committed to do, which is why I would welcome the Russians and others to participate, is we committed to protect the security and physical and personal integrity of all the people who live in Kosovo, including the Serb minority. Now, if everybody still wanted to live by that, then the Kosovars themselves will have to decide how to organize their political life after that is over. Our objective is to get them back, to get the Serb forces out, the Kosovars back in, and have the international security force there.

International Security Force for Kosovo

Q. Mr. President, you are here as the Commander in Chief of the last, if only one, superpower. Can you assure us today that there will be an international security force in Kosovo, and when? How many soldiers do you need to be in that force, whoever they are? Do you agree with Jacques Chirac that this force should be under the mandate of the U.N. Security Council? And last, who will be the lead for the force, will it be a U.S., an American general, to lead the force in Kosovo?

The President. First, I think it's important that there be an international security force, that NATO be at the core of it, because otherwise, I don't think the Kosovars will go home. And it would be a terrible thing to set this up and not have it work.

I think other nations should be involved because of all the historical, cultural, religious elements involved in this region. I hope the Russians will be there, and I hope others will be. I would welcome a U.N. sanction. It would be far better if the United Nations embraced this. And it would be most likely to work, I think, if it worked something has happened in Bosnia.

So, in terms of how many and who does what, those are things that would have to be worked out by the people who are in a better position to do that and particularly the military people who would know what is necessary to maintain security not only for the Kosovars but for the people who will be asked to go there and whose lives will be put at risk. But I think that could be worked out rather easily if we can get broad agreement that it will be done, that there will be broad participation. And I think, if that can happen, then I believe the United Nations Security Council and the U.N. as a whole would endorse it.

Group of Eight Agreement

Q. But when you will leave Germany tonight, can you be determined and can you be assured that they will be in agreement today? As you know, there will be a G–8 meeting. Do you think they will be in agreement on the principle of that force and that this force will go to Kosovo at some point before the end of the summer, or even——

The President. Obviously, I don't know exactly what day it will occur, because that depends upon what happens in the days

ahead, on the diplomatic front, on the military front, and that depends in part on what happens in the weather, in the skies above us. But I can tell you this: I have no intention of changing policies until the basic conditions are met.

I will stay at it for as long as it takes. And therefore, I can tell you that, insofar as the United States and our Allies have anything to do about it, the Kosovars will go home.

Now, you asked me today can I assure you that the G–8 will make an agreement today. I think they're getting closer. Obviously, it depends upon where the Russians will be today and because they're part of the G–8. But they've worked very hard to reach a common understanding. They're getting closer, and I wouldn't be surprised if it happens today. If it doesn't happen today, I think it will happen soon. I think we're working very hard to work through this.

And the thing I have asked the Russians to consider is not to treat these basic conditions of ours as if they are negotiable, because they are basically what is—it's not about politics. This is about what would be necessary to actually have this thing work. You have over a million people who have left their homes. Why would they go back? What will it take to get them back? What will it take to relieve the pressure on Macedonia, on Albania, on the other frontline states? What would it take, once they got back, for people to actually live in peace? That's all these conditions do. There are lots of other things that we can talk about, but these basic conditions are necessary to make it work.

And since it is obvious that politically it would work better if the Russians were a part of it, just as they have been an integral part of what happened in Bosnia, giving real credibility to the international force there, I think there's a good chance we can get a G–8 agreement.

Conditions for Bombing Pause

Q. There would be no pause then before this force will go to Kosovo in the bombing—there will be no pause in the campaign of bombing until there is agreement for that?

The President. Well, at the NATO Summit we adopted a position on that, and I think I should just simply repeat our position. Our position is that in order to have a pause in bombing, there would have to be an agreement to an international force with NATO at the core, an agreement for the Serb forces to withdraw, for the refugees to return, and the beginning of a withdrawal. That is the position that NATO adopted. And I want to just restate what our common position is. Nineteen countries took it, and I have to honor it.

Vision for Southeast Europe

Q. Mr. President, you are fully right saying this is not about politics. Something about politics, sir—people in Macedonia, both Albanians and Macedonians, are very much concerned for their future. And I think all nations from the Balkans are very much concerned for the perspectives of the region. We are seeing that you're confronting Mr. Milosevic for almost a decade on the tactical level. What we are not seeing is that anyone is offering to the region any kind of a plan for a wider integration.

It's not only of money; it's not only a Marshall plan; it's something that people will have to hope for, something which will show their perspectives as a region. Do you think about some kind of developing a plan?

The President. Yes.

Q. Will you elaborate a little bit, sir?

The President. Yes. As I have worked on this over the last 6 years, first in Bosnia and then in Kosovo, it has become clear to me that the United States and Europe have spent perhaps—well, I wouldn't say too much time because we had to do it, but we have spent most of our time trying to keep bad things from happening or, if something bad happens, to try to either reverse it or minimize it. We have spent too little time imagining how to make good things happen in the Balkans and in southeastern Europe. And yet, much good has happened.

The President of Bulgaria said at the NATO meeting, he said, ''The problem we have is that we have freedom, but we have no prosperity, and we don't have a vision of where we're all going together in the future.'' And I think that there are a lot of myths about your part of the world that have caught on in Europe and in the United States—you know, that, ''Well, the Balkans people have

fought for centuries, and there will always be contention. It's just a problem to be managed.'' And that, I think, is a violation of, first of all, the accurate history of the region and, secondly, of the integrity and potential of the people.

So several weeks ago, for about a week before the NATO Summit, I went out to San Francisco and talked to the American newspaper editors and said that we could never hope to have the right sort of future for all of Europe until we had a positive vision for southeastern Europe, that included not only an economic revitalization package that would embrace, obviously, the people who are in conflict today but the larger region of southeastern Europe, but a political package that would both tie the free nations closer to the rest of Europe and bring them closer to each other.

I think that one of the things that we have learned in the aftermath of the cold war is that there are plenty of things, forces, that will pull people apart if they're exploited—religious and ethnic differences—and it's no good for me or anyone else just to stand up and keep giving a sermon about how, well, people should be nice to each other, and they should pull together. There needs to be a magnet, a stronger force pulling people together than the forces pulling people apart. That means there has to be an economic revitalization program that embraces the region. That means there has to be a political strategy to integrate the region more closely to Europe and to bring people together.

Think about it. Think about Bulgaria, Romania, Macedonia, Albania, all the countries of the former Yugoslavia and the independent republics within it. If you think about it, if they were working together, think how much better they would all be, including the Serbs, if they were working together and if they were making money together and if they thought they had a future with Europe, with the United States, and with Russia. If there was some integrated vision, then you would fight this total rush to disintegration we've seen over the last decade.

Q. Are there any deadlines in this kind of vision——

The President. Well, I think, first of all, to implement it, I think we should begin as soon as possible. And the Europeans are working on it now. We have to decide what will the role of the EU be, what will the role of the OSCE be, what will the role of the United States be. But I feel very strongly about it.

You know, we spent—the United States has invested, just in the last month, almost $90 million in humanitarian aid. And we have a package moving through the Congress now that has about $700 million more. And I believe we should do this. And I worry very much about the burdens that this crisis impose on Macedonia and Albania in particular. But the truth is that is would be better for all of us if we were free to spend the money to build a long-term economic future for Macedonia, a long-term economic future for Albania. Especially—Macedonia has recently resolved a lot of its difficulties with Greece; there is more trade and investment going on here. This is the direction of the future.

So when we get the Kosovo crisis behind us, we should be focusing much more on this future we imagined for southeastern Europe. This is also—to go back to your question—this is particularly important for Italy, because Italy has paid a big economic price for this crisis.

Q. Is the plan going to include Serbia? Are you going to offer some kind of perspective for Serbia, as well, because it seems to be important?

The President. Well, first of all, I think it would be better if it did long-term, because Serbia is a big part of southeastern Europe and a big part of the Balkans. I think the extent to which the plan includes Serbia depends almost entirely on how the Serbians behave.

You're not going to have—let's just take Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Albania, and Bosnia is still in a lot of trouble. Just take those countries. Here they are without anything like the industrial base of Serbia, anything like the wealth. And they're struggling to be democratic, to be free. Romania solves its problems with Hungary. They make their border and their ethnic resolution and under much more adverse circumstances. And the Serbs are continuing to promote ethnic cleansing when these other countries are

promoting diversity, respect for human rights, democracy.

Now, it would be much better—how can you have the Balkans without Belgrade? It would be much better if they were a part of it, but it depends on their conduct. They cannot be part of something that they don't share the values of. The principles of this cooperation have to be: respect for the independence of countries, respect for the integrity of people, respect for human rights, respect for religious and ethnic diversity, and then a common respect for economic cooperation, and then some framework for it.

But I would far rather be in a position to see the United States investing in the growth and prosperity and cooperation of the region than building temporary housing for a million refugees. And unless we have a positive vision for the Balkans, we will be back with a crisis like this again in a few years.

Q. In 5 years.

The President. Yes.

Future Political Status of Kosovo

Q. Mr. President, how does the American administration see the future political status of Kosovo? Do you still oppose independence?

The President. The NATO Alliance voted to support, in effect, an international protected autonomous status for Kosovo. And I believe that that is the best thing to do now, because I believe that it would be very difficult—I see the struggles of Albania, I see the struggles of Macedonia. I think it would be even more difficult for Kosovo to be economically and politically self-sufficient. And I think that if there were a big independence movement now, you would have this whole counterfear that, ''Oh, well, we used to be worried about Greater Serbia; now is it Greater Albania?'' You would have all these arguments back and forth.

And I believe the best outcome for Kosovo, the best outcome, would be to prove that the people of Kosovo could live together in peace and harmony and security. There is a Serb minority in Kosovo, as you know. I think this will be hard now because a lot of the people will go home, and they will say their neighbors turned their backs on me when I was run away. And the Kosovars will have to find a lot of forgiveness in their heart to live with their neighbors. I'm sure of that. But if you accept the vision for the future that we just discussed, that we want to try to bring the people of the Balkans and southeast Europe together, and then to bring them closer to the rest of Europe, economically and politically, I think we can more likely further that vision if Kosovo is protected by an international force in its integrity as an independent or autonomous part of Serbia. That's what I believe.

Now, again, what happens over the long run in Kosovo will depend a great deal on how the Serbians behave and how the government behaves. But I believe that the position that the NATO Allies unanimously took to support autonomy and a protected status is the better course, based on where we are now and the kind of future we're trying to build. Whether it can be sustained over the long run—and I know what you're thinking by the implication of your question—whether it can be sustained over the long run will depend upon how the Serbs conduct themselves.

Q. Mr. President, I understand, unfortunately, our time is up. So let me say thank you for joining us and answering our questions. And have a good day and visit.

The President. I would just like to say one thing before I close, because you all represent, well, a broad spectrum of European opinion, and I know this has been a frustrating and difficult thing for Europe, as well as agony for the people of southeastern Europe. But I think there are a lot of things to be hopeful about here. After all, this endeavor in which NATO has been involved, we never had to do anything like this before. We had to do something like this in Bosnia, but not so much was involved by the time we actually moved in '95.

I think that all of us felt when the Kosovo situation came up, we had our nightmares of Bosnia. And we all wondered if we had moved more quickly, if we could have saved more lives and avoided more difficulty there. And so here you have this unusual situation where you're trying to get 19 countries, all with their own political situations, all with their own dynamics in the country, all with

their history of relating to the various countries in the region, to get together and pursue a common policy consistent with the facts on the ground. And I don't think you should be discouraged by the fact that instant results were not obtained.

But we are fighting for a very important principle. The 21st century world will either be dominated by greater economic and political cooperation and harmony among peoples of different background or it will be dominated by a disintegrationist vision of religious and racial and ethnic exclusivity. And you see it in most of the conflicts in the world today.

So this is a very important thing that is being done here. And we have to prevail because I would like the troubles of the Balkans to be viewed as the last typical conflict of the 20th century, rather than the first typical conflict of the 21st century. So we have to be patient and firm and understand that this is a highly unusual thing for 19 countries to be trying to work their way through this.

End of the Kosovo Conflict

Q. When do you see the need of the war, Mr. President? Everybody is worried in Europe, when is the war over?

The President. Well, that's the wrong worry. That's the wrong worry. What the people of Europe need to know is that their governments are doing the right thing and that it will be over, and that when it finishes, it will finish in a way that will permit Europe to be united and democratic and free for the first time in the history of the continent.

Now, that is quite an achievement. And it is worth waiting for. It will not drag on for years. We're not talking about endlessly. But we cannot expect an instantaneous result. This is worth—I would say to the people of Europe, support your leaders. After all, look at this: We have the governments of the left and governments of the right, all coming together to support this, because they understand they can make this the last war of Europe's 20th century, not the typical conflict of the 21st century. This is very important. It's worth waiting for. I'm not talking about years, but we shouldn't say, ''Well, it's not finished by next Wednesday, we want to quit.'' We can't do that.

Q. Mr. President, some people would say it's worth not only fighting for, because of the principles you've outlined, but also fighting very hard for. And some people wonder if you have the right strategy and the right contingency plans if Milosevic proves more difficult to move.

The President. Well, we're updating our contingency plan. We authorized the military committee of NATO to upgrade their assessment of what would be required if we had to send in forces in a nonpermissive environment, and what is happening.

Q. You mean that's the ground force debate that everybody constantly talks about?

The President. Yes. We authorized that. But you have to understand, we believe, I believe this strategy will work. This is not something, oh, we're doing this because we can't do that. And there are—what the NATO powers are struggling for is to achieve our objective in Kosovo, to do it in a way that brings Europe closer together, and, as I said, I think it's helpful to think—makes this the last typical conflict of the 20th century, not the first representative conflict of the 21st century.

That means we're trying to do it in a way that preserves our unity to the maximum extent possible. Keep in mind, we have Greece still in NATO. This is a very difficult problem. It's hard in Italy, but it's really hard in Greece. And they are staying in NATO, right there, going along here. And we are working with Russia to try to effect through diplomacy these basic conditions and then something like what we had in Bosnia. So the strategy we are pursuing is not because the United States or Britain or some other country says, ''Oh, we're afraid of ground forces.'' It's because we believe, a, it will work, and b, if it works, this is the method most likely to assure long-term European unity.

And so again I say, be patient with your leaders and be persistent and be determined. This will work. And it is worth paying the price of a little time, because the stakes are very high.

NOTE: The interview began at approximately 9:23 a.m. In his remarks, the President referred to Gen. Klaus Naumann, chairman, North Atlantic Treaty Organization Military Committee; Gen. Wesley K. Clark, Supreme Allied Commander Europe; President Slobodan Milosevic of

the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); Special Envoy and former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin of Russia; Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema of Italy; Ibrahim Rugova, leader, Democratic League of Kosovo; President Peter Stoyanov of Bulgaria. The President also referred to the European Union (EU); and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Remarks in a Discussion With Kosovar Refugees in Ingelheim, Germany

May 6, 1999

The President. First of all, let me say that I realize that all of you have been through incredible times and that it must be even harder to talk about. But I want to thank Chancellor Schroeder and the people of Germany for providing a place for you to be and for their support for our united action to reverse what has happened in Kosovo, so that you can go home again and be safe and free.

Just today, my wife met the first group of refugees from Kosovo coming to the United States. They will stay there, as you are staying in Germany, until we can provide the conditions that are necessary for people to go home.

Most people in the world would have a hard time believing what has happened to you and that it has, in fact, happened. So far we have been very fortunate, Chancellor Schroeder and I and all of our Allies in NATO, in having our people, by and large, support what we are doing to try to stop what happened to you and to reverse the conditions so that you can go back.

But it is very important that your stories be told. What Chancellor Schroeder said is right. In places where people who have different religions and different ethnic groups, different racial groups, where they get along together, where they work together, where they help each other, people find what has happened to you to be literally almost unbelievable. And so the world needs to know the truth of Kosovo. And we need to make sure that we are all strong enough to stay with you and to support you until you can go home.

So again, I say, I know this must be hard for you to be here talking to us and to all of us strangers here. But we appreciate it, and we would like to hear from you, to say whatever you wish to say to us about where you are now and what happened in Kosovo, any questions you wish to ask. We just want to be with you and to hear from you. And we thank you for taking the time to be with us.

[*At this point, the Kosovar refugees began their remarks. One of the refugees asked what NATO was doing to help people left behind in Kosovo, with supplies and materials.*]

The President. It is a very hard problem, helping the people who are left behind, because if they send planes in there to drop supplies, they could be shot out of the sky. And it's also hard to drop the supplies and know that the Kosovar Albanians will get it, instead of having the Serb military or the paramilitary pick it up. So it's a problem.

I can say that we have been working very hard to try to find some neutral country that we could get agreement to ship in food and medicine and tents, whatever is necessary for people to have some place safe to sleep. And we are exploring every conceivable alternative. We're even looking at whether we can do some air drops, even though there may be some risk there, to try to get the food there. It is the biggest concern we have.

Mr. Schroeder and I were just talking on the way in. For the refugees that are in Albania, we need to give them more money; we need to give the Albanian Government more money. The people are welcome there, but it's a poor country, so we have to help them. For the refugees in Macedonia, we have to have more money, but also we have to help more people get out of Macedonia, because of the problems within Macedonia. There's a lot of tension there. And so there's only so many refugees that the country can take without having the democratic government of Macedonia threatened. So we have to work on that.

So we have refugees coming to Germany and coming to the United States and elsewhere. But the ones that it's so hard for is